

Chapter 7

Social Media Communication and Sustainability Perception in Business: The Moderating Role of Social Media Influencers


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ABSTRACT

Achieving the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) has become very important in the survival of the human race and the earth's ecosystem. The purpose of this study is to see the effectiveness of social media communication and how it influences consumer behavior perception on environmental sustainability and the role of social media influencers. This chapter is a conceptual manuscript. The researcher used literature from good and reliable databases such as Emerald, Sage, Taylor & Francis, Web of Science, Elsevier, and others. Desk research was adopted and literature covering the relevant constructs in the title and model were reviewed and thoroughly discussed and meanings and implications were synthesized.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) has become very important in the survival of the human race and the earth's ecosystem. Social media platforms have quickly emerged as a formidable

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communications tool, exerting significant influence not just in urban centres but also in rural areas (Ahmad et al., 2019; Golmohammadi et al., 2023). The digital revolution has affected businesses and how individuals communicate and made the globe more accessible. How people communicate has been profoundly altered by the rise of social media, which has also become an indispensable component of people's everyday life. To ensure the continued health and prosperity of future generations, it is the duty of all of us (businesses and individuals) to ensure the conservation of natural resources and the protection of global ecosystems. Sustainability is also described as preserving and improving environmental quality over the long term to prevent the exhaustion or degradation of natural resources (Bruno & Dabrowski, 2016). Environmental sustainability is, thus, the practice of not compromising future generations' ability to satisfy their requirements while also providing for the current population's needs. Firms that practice activities that are friendly to the environment will eventually will more customers because society is growing in awareness of the environment (Okuah et al., 2019). Social media communication can therefore be used effectively to draw society's attention to the benefits of sustainability practices. *The use of social media can make businesses, individuals, and society change their behaviour positively towards brands, products and firms to protect humanity and the environment (Radi & Shokouhyar, 2021).*

A new type of consumer influencer that has emerged on the scene in the past few decades and growing rapidly due to the proliferation of social networking sites, social media and billions of users on the internet is called social media influencers (SMIs) (Qalati et al., 2021; Radi & Shokouhyar, 2021). SMIs are social media users who have acquired many followers and achieved a certain level of credibility, both of which can lead to an impact or a level of persuasion in their interactions with their followers (Malik et al., 2023). Based on their popularity, many brands and marketers use them to promote and create awareness of their products and services (Ho & Rezaei, 2018; Malik et al., 2023). Given their popularity and ability to influence their followers, SMI could be an effective tool to help engage with the public to influence their perception to adopt pro-environmental behaviour and buy environmentally friendly products. SMIs have become an excellent source for reaching target audiences credibly and efficiently due to their capacity to grow a considerable number of followers and generate influence, confidence, and trust among followers (Malik et al., 2023). Despite their increasing growth and wide usage among marketers and brands, little is known about how SMIs are used to influence consumer perception towards social and environmentally sustainable products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of Social Media

Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WeChat have changed from being a platform for direct electronic information exchange to a globally connected circle, photo-sharing websites, virtual meetings, instant global news, and a retail platform in less than a few decades (ElAlfy, Darwish, et al., 2020; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2021). Social media has occupied a significant portion of our lives and is progressively attracting the attention of businesses (Voorveld, 2019). However, when did social media begin, and what does it mean? How did the quick transition from print media like newspapers and magazines to digital media like computers and smartphones happen?

The exponential growth of social media platforms at the turn of the 20th century was notable. In the 1940s, the first supercomputers were developed; shortly after that, scientists and engineers began to work

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